

Lost Scout Scenario

A buddy pair of two 12-year-old Scouts at a Scout summer camp left the Dining Hall after lunch (1:00 pm) for a 5-mile Perimeter Loop Trail hike. One had hiked the trail before. They reported their plan to their Patrol Leader before leaving. The Patrol Leader confirmed that each camper had 2 liters of water in their daypacks and a Scout Essentials kit. The Patrol Leader reminded the Scouts to return by 5:00 pm in time for the unit line up at 5:30 pm.

At the 5:30 pm unit line up at the Dining Hall for evening announcements and the Camp Grace before dinner, neither Scout was present. The Patrol Leader reported their absence to their Scoutmaster, who notified the Camp Director.

Scenario Details:

Missing: Scouts L and P, both 12, attending a summer camp.

PLS: Dining Hall, 1:00 PM (after lunch).

Plan: Hike the 5-mile "Perimeter Loop Trail" (usually a 2–3 hour hike).

Time of Notification: 5:45 PM

The two hikers did not show up for dinner assembly at 5:30 pm.

Environmental Factors: Sunny, 78°F, overnight low expected in the 50s

Trail runs through a dense, hilly, forested area with a steep ravine section.

Hasty Search Actions (6:00 PM - 7:00 PM)

- The Camp Director activated the camp Lost Camper Protocol and promptly organized a Hasty Search and contacted the Council Scout Executive.
- The Camp Director asked the Senior Patrol Leader and Scoutmasters from the missing Scouts' troop led Scouts to check the troop campsite, including inside every tent, all restrooms and showers, the Camp Trading Post, the Craft Shelter, and indoor game areas.
- The Camp Director asked the Camp Health Officer to review the Scouting America Annual Health and Medical Record forms.
- Members of other troops were sent to check their campsites, tents, and any nearby structures.
- The Camp Director sent a trio of camp staff with radios and whistles
 - to the Range and Target Activity areas on their way to the waterfront.
 - to check staff and visitor cabins and lounges and camp supply closets.
 - to hike quickly or jog to the start of the trail, calling out the hikers' names and blowing sequences of three short whistle blasts and listening for any responses and looking for any discarded or dropped gear.
 - to a high point near the ravine to shout and blow whistle blasts, while others checked a creek crossing.
- Interviews with campers who saw them leaving the Dining Hall area after lunch confirmed that the hikers had water bottles and were wearing light clothing.
- The Camp Health Officer reported that both Scouts had good health and took no medications.
- After the Hasty Search had been underway for 20 minutes and searchers had not reported any visual or sound contact with the hikers and had reported no clues along

the camp roads or shortcuts, the Camp Director activated the next step in camp Lost Camper Protocol. The Camp Director reported the missing Scouts to the local sheriff's department so that the Search and Rescue team of sheriff's deputies, firefighters, and trained volunteers would be deployed for a full-scale search.

- o The Camp Director contacted the parents of the missing Scouts to let them know of the situation and of the searches that are underway.

Possible Outcomes:

1. The hikers were found in their own tents, asleep on their bunks. They had a successful hike and were especially tired afterwards, so they decided to take a nap before dinner and overslept.

2. The Hasty Search was expanded to a Trail Sweep Search. Camp staff continued along the Perimeter Loop Trail from both ends, calling out the hikers' names and blowing three whistle blasts in sequence. About 2 miles from the start of the trail near the ravine, one team of camp staff heard three whistle blasts in sequence from somewhere down in the ravine. They continued along the trail to find the loudest response. The searchers found a turn in the trail where the embankment down into the ravine was freshly disturbed as if someone had slid downward there. They found both hikers at the bottom of the ravine, muddy and a little cold but uninjured. They had tried to take a shortcut back to their campsite, but the sides of the ravine were too muddy and slick for them to climb out.

The camp staff used their radio to call for help from the Climbing Tower staff. In about 20 minutes, the Climbing Tower staff arrived in two UTVs (Utility Task Vehicles) with four seats in each to bring climbing ropes and extra helmets. The staff worked together with the Scouts to pull up their daypacks, then to pull up the Scouts. The Scouts rode back to their troop campsite to clean up before they ate their delayed dinner.

3. As dusk approached (7:30 pm), the Hasty Search showed that the Scouts may have changed their plan. A searcher near the Scouts' campsite found white toilet tissue rolled into a flimsy cord about 12 inches long tied with an overhand knot to a bush near an old trail sign shaped like an arrow. The searchers interpreted the homemade trail marker as possible evidence for the LKP (Last Known Place). The sign was lying on the ground near an abandoned trail with fresh scuff marks. The sign had faded paint that read "Fishing Trail". The sign pointed downhill toward the camp lake. The trail descended into a thick, low-visibility area. Searchers, recognizing the potential for cool nighttime temperatures, escalated to a Sound and Light Sweep Grid Search.

Lost Person Behavior

According to Dr. Robert Koester's Lost Person Behavior models and the International Search and Rescue Incident Database (ISRID), 12-year-old hikers are classified as "school-age" or "pre-teen" children. Children in the 10–12 age range exhibit distinct psychological patterns that influence where they go.

Where they are found: They will likely be found within one mile of their Last Known Position (LKP).

Linear Features: Most are found on or near roads, trails, or fences.

Structures: Over 50% are found in man-made structures like sheds, porches, abandoned buildings, or even vehicles.

Prominent Landmarks: They are often found near scenic high points, lake shores, or areas with a clear view.

Drainages: If they become truly disoriented, they may follow a stream or drainage downhill.

How they get lost:

Shortcut Taking: This is the most common cause of getting lost. They often leave the trail to find a "faster" way back and lose the path.

Mental Mapping: They have developed "mental maps" but often overestimate their navigational skills. When lost, they may try to "get themselves unlost" rather than staying put.

Trail Running: When panic sets in, they may begin to run along a trail or path in a random direction, significantly increasing the distance from their LKP.

Responsiveness: Unlike younger children (who may hide from strangers), 12-year-olds usually respond to searchers calling their names or using whistles.

24-Hour Window:

Survival rates are high (near 95%) if found within 24 hours. After this, the probability of a live find drops significantly (to roughly 38%) because they may lack the survival skills or gear to endure cold or wet conditions.

Distance:

While 50% are found within a mile, searchers are often warned that older children can "outrun" the search if they are trail running.

Companionship:

If they are with a friend or sibling, they tend to act more maturely and stay together, making them easier to find than a solo child.